

Amendments To The Claims

This listing of claims will replace all prior versions, and listings, of claims in the application:

Listing Of Claims:

1. (CURRENTLY AMENDED) A manufacturing operation comprising:

a production area;

a delivery area;

a plurality of platforms each having a controller and an independently controllable and steerable drive assembly, wherein said controller is capable of steering said drive assembly and wherein adjacent platforms are spaced from one another a first distance in said delivery area and a second distance in said production area, said first distance being greater than said second distance.

2. (CURRENTLY AMENDED) The manufacturing operation of claim 1 ~~further including~~

~~a wherein said controller is in communication communicating with the drive assemblies assembly to communicate a current command to each of the drive assemblies assembly, thereby controlling the velocity of each platform to maintain a zero gap between adjacent platforms in the production area.~~

3. (ORIGINAL) The manufacturing operation of claim 2 wherein the plurality of platforms

include a first platform and a second platform, said second platform following said first platform in the production area.

4. (ORIGINAL) The manufacturing operation of claim 2 further including a bridge

mechanism spanning the zero gap between the first and second platforms in the production area.

5. (ORIGINAL) The manufacturing operation of claim 4 wherein said bridge mechanism

includes a bridge plate movably coupled to one of the first and second platforms.

6. (ORIGINAL) The manufacturing operation of claim 5 wherein said bridge plate is pivotably coupled to said one of the first and second platforms and wherein the other of the first and second platforms includes a cam engageable with the pivoting plate.

7. (ORIGINAL) The manufacturing operation of claim 6 wherein said bridge plate is pivotable about an axis substantially perpendicular to a direction of travel of said one of the first and second platforms.

8. (ORIGINAL) The manufacturing operation of claim 4 wherein said bridging mechanism includes a resilient bumper fixed to one of the first and second platforms.

9. (ORIGINAL) The manufacturing operation of claim 1 wherein each of said plurality of platforms further includes a link coupler maintaining a zero gap between adjacent platforms.

10. (CURRENTLY AMENDED) A The manufacturing operation of ~~claim 9 comprising:~~
a production area;
a delivery area;
a plurality of platforms each having an independently controllable and steerable drive assembly
and a ~~wherein~~said link coupler including includes a proximity sensor, wherein adjacent platforms are spaced from one another a first distance in said delivery area and a second distance in said production area, said first distance being greater than said second distance and wherein said proximity sensor is mounted to each of the platforms and communicating with the controller, said controller controlling the speed of the platform drive assembly in response to signals from the proximity sensor to maintain zero gaps between adjacent platforms.

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11. (ORIGINAL) The manufacturing operation of claim 9 wherein said link coupler includes a latch mechanically coupling adjacent platforms in said production area.

Claims 12 -21 (CANCELLED)

22. (NEW) A manufacturing operation comprising:

a production area;

a delivery area;

a plurality of platforms, each having a controller and an independently controllable and steerable drive assembly and wherein said controller on each platform is in communication with the drive assembly of the platform and capable of moving the platform relative to an adjacent platform and wherein adjacent platforms are spaced from one another a first distance in said delivery area and a second distance in said production area, said first distance being greater than said second distance.

23. (NEW) The manufacturing operation of Claim 22, wherein said controller communicates a current command to the drive assembly to control the velocity of the platform to maintain a zero gap between adjacent platforms in the production area.

24. (NEW) The manufacturing operation of claim 22 wherein said controller communicates a current command to the drive assembly to control the direction of the platform relative to an adjacent platform.

25. (NEW) The manufacturing operation of claim 1 further including a central controller in communication with said controller.

26. (NEW) The manufacturing operation of claim 25 wherein said central controller in communication with said controller controls the velocity of each platform to maintain a zero gap between adjacent platforms in the production area.

27. (NEW) The manufacturing operation of claim 25 wherein said central controller in communication with said controller controls the direction of said drive assembly.

28. (NEW) A manufacturing operation comprising:
a production area;
a delivery area;
a plurality of platforms each having an independently controllable and steerable drive assembly and wherein adjacent platforms are spaced from one another a first distance in said delivery area and a second distance in said production area, said first distance being greater than said second distance; and
a central controller communicating with the drive assemblies to communicate a current command to the drive assemblies, thereby controlling the velocity of each platform to maintain a zero gap between adjacent platforms in the production area and wherein said central controller communicates with the drive assemblies to control the direction of each platform.